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ABSTRACT

During the 1960s and early 1970s two educational movements were the evolution of the middle school and the structures of disciplines approach to social studies. These movements involved school organization, curriculum development, and methodologies incorporating the inquiry or conceptual approach. Learners had trouble with the conceptual approach, and there were problems in the implementation of interdisciplinary team teaching concepts, another trend of the era. Merging the concepts and generalizations developed from specific social studies disciplines produced "A Conceptual Framework for the Social Studies," the Wisconsin State Department of Public Instruction social studies guide. It suggested broad topics of study for grades five through eight along with the study of generalizations and concepts. This approach required matching appropriate content and instructional styles with the cognitive ability and personal needs of early adolescents. (JHP)

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BY

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SOCIAL STUDIES: A PLAN FOR MIDDLE SCHOOLS

by

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During the 1960s and early 1970s there were two movements which caught the attention of many educators throughout the country. One had to do primarily with school organization and structure and was generally referred to as "the middle school concept." The other concerned curriculum and instruction and was generally referred to as "the structure of the disciplines."

The Middle School became a way of solving school building and classroom shortage problems although it was touted by many proponents (including the author) as an approach to improving educational programs for early adolescents. Middle schools were proposed because the junior high schools were fraught with all kinds of problems. They were indeed junior high schools. They emphasized subjects rather than children. And because of "earlier maturity," the 6th grade could well be moved into a middle school environment and 9th graders could be moved into the high school environment. The fact that such an arrangement solved many classroom and building problems was "frosting on the cake."

The other movement was generally referred to as "the structure of the disciplines." Jerome Bruner is generally recognized as the "father" of the movement which was presented in his famous book The Process of Education (Bruner, 1960). A discipline was defined as having two general characteristics--the process which the scholars of a particular discipline use in arriving at knowledge and the knowledge which is

arrived at by that process. A critical aspect of the approach was that scholars in a particular discipline could/would identify the basic concepts in the field which would then become the guiding structure for teachers and learners. With these concepts as a guide, it was proposed that they can be taught, as Bruner said, "effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development" (Bruner, 1960). In curricular language this is generally referred to as a "spiral curriculum."

The structure of the discipline's movement resulted in numerous curriculum development and teacher education projects--many of them supported by federal grants. Perhaps the most famous (or infamous, depending on your perspective) was "Man: A Course of Study." Many of the projects were in the sciences and mathematics. The focus of most of these projects was to introduce/review the concepts of the discipline and the conceptual approach.

It is interesting to contemplate what effect this movement has had on schooling since the 1960s. There is some question as to whether it had any great effect on how teachers teach. Perhaps the most lasting effect came about as textbook writers and publishers injected some of the conceptual approach in their text material along with suggested activities and end-of-chapter or unit questions. A parallel question might be the effect Bloom (1956) and the Taxonomy of Educational Objectives has had. Bruner (1971) himself questioned the movesment, especially in regard to its relevance to the social problems of the times and the ability of learners to deal with the conceptual approach.

The development and implementation of the middle school concept was no easier road than the stucture of the disciplines approach. The

literature is replete with lists of the "proper" characteristics of a middle school. In regard to the proposal presented here, one characteristic which appears in most definitions emphasizes an interdisciplinary approach which would involve a team teaching structure including the areas of language arts, mathematics, science and social studies. This structure has proved to be easier to propose than it is to implement. Historically the same problem occurred in the attempt to implement a social/personal problems "core curriculum."

The following proposal is not meant to denigrate an interdisciplinary approach. Indeed, the author is an advocate of such a plan. However, it is recognition of how difficult it is to actually implement an interdisciplinary approach. It seems that the discipline curriculum is a "fact of life." It is the author's contention that the proposal might be a compromise between a "pure" interdisciplinary approach and the "subject" conceptual approach in the various social science disciplines.

Social Studies in the Middle School

During the late 1960s and early 1970s the author had the opportunity to work with a number of school districts in the development of a middle school program. It was interesting to note that the social studies curriculum in grades 6, 7, and 8 (the grades usually included in a middle school) generally encompassed all times, all peoples and all parts of the world--and even the universe. One wondered how students of this age could possibly "digest" all of the concepts and generalizations of the social science disciplines in the context of such a broad span of our history and our world.

During this period there was an interesting curriculum development project of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction which was titled A Conceptual Framework for the Social Studies in Wisconsin Schools (Wisconsin DPI, 1967). Essentially, the critical concepts and generalizations from the social science disciplines of history, anthropology-sociology, political science, economics and geography were identified as the basis for the Social Studies curriculum. (Note that there is somewhat of a problem in that at the university level, anthropology and sociology are generally considered separate disciplines and departments. Also, it is interesting to note that psychology is not included, especially because adolescents are intrigued by the subject.)

There was quite a good deal of debate during this time as to the difference between a concept and a generalization. The following ideas regarding concepts, generalizations, and the conceptual approach are quoted from the Conceptual Framework:

On Concepts

> . . . perceptions and experiences alone have no meaning until organized into concepts on the basis of common qualities or characteristics. . . . a concept is a cognitive abstraction which is used to organize, give meaning to, and communicate human experience.
>
> . . . each field of study has at its core concepts, which may or may not be unique to the field, but which are basic to its understanding.
>
> . . . the products of conceptualizing (concepts themselves) constitute knowledge objectives, and the process of conceptualizing furnishes both skill objectives and methods of instruction.
>
> But concepts are not enough . . . What is needed in addition is something that asserts a relationship among two or more concepts. This is called a "generalization."
>
> In the teaching and learning process, concepts and generalizations frequently appear together; indeed, some authorities suggest they are inseparable.

As concepts develop in the minds of the students, they are related to other concepts, generalizations, and social reality through the process of generalizing.

As has been indicated, a critical aspect of the conceptual approach is the identification of the concepts/generalization in the various disciplines. Numerous people were involved in this process in the development of the Conceptual Framework. There was a sub-committee for each of the disciplines in conjunction with a general steering and editorial committee. These committees included representatives from elementary and secondary schools, from the Department of Public Instruction and colleges and universities. The following are the "Generalizations Incorporating Major Social Studies Concepts" which were identified for the social science disciplines:

History

I. Change is inevitable, and the rate of change is uneven among and within societies.

II. Human experience is both continuous and interrelated (continuity).

III. Acts and events have both causes and consequences which are never simple and often complex (cause and effect).

IV. People tend to judge or interpret the past in the light of their own times and experience (nature of evidence).

V. Each civilization has certain significant values and beliefs that evolve out of the developing culture and, in turn, influence its growth and development.

Anthropology - Sociology

I. Man is a unique being, and while each individual is unique in some ways, greater similarities exist among men than dissimilarities.

II. Man has unique, common needs which are met within a social setting through a membership in primary and secondary groups (social being).

III. Within these groups man develops accepted ways and means of meeting his needs and coping with the problems of living in groups. These ways and means are called institutions.

IV. A society's whole system of institutions, including the artifacts it produces, constitutes its culture. All cultures have some common characteristics called cultural universals.

V. Individuals learn accepted ways of perceiving, thinking and behaving from their culture and in turn can effect changes in that culture as it becomes inefficient or self-defeating in meeting the needs of the society it serves (acculturation, assimilation, patterning of behavior).

VI. This cultural change is a continuous and accelerating process, effected through invention and borrowing. Change in one facet of a culture brings about a change throughout that culture (cultural change).

Political Science

I. Every society creates laws. Penalties and sanctions are provided for violations of law.

II. Governments are established by men to provide protection and services. In some governments people delegate the authority; in others authority is imposed (philosophy - ideology).

III. Democracy is government in which decision making is in the hands of the people who make their desires known through voting, political parties and pressure groups. Democracy seeks to protect the rights of individuals and minority groups.

IV. Citizenship involves varying degrees of obligations and privileges depending upon the form of government. An active, educated citizenry is essential to a democracy (leadership).

V. There is a division of responsibility and an interdependence at all levels of government; local, state and national. All nations of the world are becoming more interdependent (institutions).

Economics

I. The conflict between unlimited wants and limited natural and human resources is the basic economic problem. Scarcity still persists in the world today.

II. Man constantly tries to narrow the gap between limited resources and unlimited wants. Geographical, occupational and technological specialization (division of work) are the results of his desire to produce more, better and faster.

III. Specialization leads to interdependence which demands a market (price) where buys and sellers can meet. The market, in turn, needs money whihc will serve as a medium of exchange, measure of value and a store of value.

IV. All of mankind is faced with four economic decisions: (1) what and how much to produce? (2) how much and in what way land (natural resources), labor and management and capital (tools) are to be used for production; (3) are the goods and services to be used for further production or immediate consumption? (4) who shall receive the products and in what proportion? (distribution).

V. Public policy, derived from a people's value system, modifies the operation of the market to promote economic growth, stability and security while attempting to minimize restructions and injustices (buiness cycles).

Geography

I. Spatial relationship exists between any place on earth and all other places. A relationship between two or more locations involves direction, distance and time.

II. Maps are representations of all or parts of the earth. They are used to record and analyze the spatial distributions and relationships of earth features and of people and their life on the earth.

III. Regions refers to an area delimited significantly different from other areas on the basis of one or more selected physical or cultural characteristics.

IV. Geographic linkage is evident among countless human settlements through the exchange of messages, goods and services.

V. New geographies are created as people develop new ideas and technology, as their appraisal and use of earth spaces change. They rearrange themselves, their activities and their creations over the earth and even modify featurs of the earth itself.

Given these generalizations, "Developmental Variants" were identified for each of the disciplines and for each grade level. While emphasizing the concepts of the various disciplines, the following variants were identified for grades 5 through 8: (Grade 5 is sometimes included in a middle school.)

Grade 5: United States Geography and History
Grade 6: Selected Cultures (Food Gathering, Agrarian, Handicraft and Industrial Complexes)
Grade 7: Man in His Political World

Grade 8: Western Civilization
Grade 9: Area Studies (Non-Western)

Note that these recommendations were made in 1967. It is interesting to compare these variants with the latest recommendations in the 1986 Department of Public Instruction Guide to Curriculum Planning in Social Studies:

Model 1:

Grade 5 - American Heritage
Grade 6 - Cultural Perspectives
Grade 7 - Global Connections
Grade 8 - Introduction to the Social Sciences and Citizenship

Model 2:

Grade 5 - American Heritage
Grade 6 - Cultural Perspectives
Grade 7 - Global Connections
Grade 8 - United States Studies

Note that the Models are the same for grades 5, 6 and 7. However, Grade 8 in Model 1 calls for an Introduction to the Social Sciences and Citizenship, whereas Model 2 calls for United States Studies. It is the contention of the author that while the following proposal does not violate either model, it is in the "spirit" of Model 1--especially in the context of the proposed grade 8 curriculum for an introduction to the Social Sciences and Citizenship.

It is also interesting to compare the recommendations in the report of the National Council for the Social Studies Task Force "In Search of a Scope and Sequence for Social Studies" (1983):

Grade 5 People of the Americas: The United States and Its Close Neighbors
Grade 6 People and Cultures: The Eastern Hemisphere
Grade 7 A Changing World of Many Nations: A Global View
Grade 8 Building a Strong and Free Nation: The United States

My Proposal:

The basic design is to divide each grade of the middle school into five units of instruction. Each unit would focus on the generalizations and concepts of one of the social science disciplines. (It might be interesting to include a sixth on psychology, especially as this is of great interest to this age group.) A time, place and people would be selected as the focus for each unit. One such scheme is suggested in Figure One. The logic of the scheme presented is to focus on world civilization, past, present and future in grade 6, on the United States in grade 7, and on early adolescents and adolescents in our culture and society in grade 8; i.e., a social/personal problems approach. (The plan in Figure 1 came from working with a group of middle school teachers who were asked to consider the proposal and suggest a time, place and people, and the sequence of the disciplines for the three years.)

To implement such a proposal, a unit approach to organization and teaching is appropriate with a "resource unit" developed as a guide for each topic. The following unit outline is suggested:

1. Rationale: Why this unit? What has preceded? What will follow? The general intent of the unit.
2. Content: The generalizations/concepts which will be developed. The major topics. The "method of inquiry" for the students which will be emphasized.
3. Objectives: In terms of intended student outcomes.
4. Evaluation: The evaluation procedures which will be used including pre-assessment, progress, and post-assessment.
5. Strategies for establishing learning set and motivation
6. Activities: Identification of a variety of activities which could be considered by the teacher and the students.
7. Resources: A comprehensive bibliography of resources available.

Figure 1

SOCIAL STUDIES: A PLAN FOR MIDDLE SCHOOLS

	ANTHROPOLOGY SOCIOLOGY	POLITICAL SCIENCE	HISTORY	GEOGRAPHY	ECONOMICS
FIRST YEAR Grade 6	CRADLE OF CIVILIZATION	GREEK AND ROMAN	MEDIEVAL TIMES	EUROPE	TRADE (DURING RENAISSANCE - 14th-16th CENTURY)

	HISTORY	POLITICAL SCIENCE	ECONOMICS	GEOGRAPHY	ANTHROPOLOGY-SOCIOLOGY
SECOND YEAR Grade 7	AGE OF EXPLORATION	AGE OF REVOLUTION	INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION	FRONTIERS	URBANIZATION

	POLITICAL SCIENCE	ANTHROPOLOGY SOCIOLOGY	HISTORY	GEOGRAPHY	ECONOMICS
THIRD YEAR Grade 8	SOURCES OF AUTHORITY	REVOLUTION OF YOUTH	PHILOSOPHY/ RELIGION	THE UNIVERSE	WORK (Careers - Production/ Consuming

Summary

In summary, the proposal would blend the ideas of the Conceptual Framework and Model 1 of the Wisconsin Social Studies Guide. It would entail emphasis on the generalizations/concepts of the several disciplines but with the specific identification of a time, place, and people most appropriate for emphasis of the generalizations/concepts of each of the disciplines and the needs and interests of the early adolescent age group. It provides for the disciplines approach and at the same time entails some of the spirit of an interdisciplinary approach which is regarded by many as an essential characteristic of the middle school.

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5/3